“The Obedience of Christ”: A Reassessment of τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ in 2 Corinthians 10:5

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Richard Longenecker has suggested that while the concept of Christ’s obedience is a “cardinal feature” in Christian theology, the actual vocabulary of obedience describes Christ’s behavior only three times in the NT (Phil 2:8; Rom 5:18; Heb 5:8).1 The goal of this essay is to argue that one more text, 2 Cor 10:5, should be added to Longenecker’s list. To be more precise, this essay will suggest that the phrase τὴν ὑπακοήν τοῦ Χριστοῦ in 2 Cor 10:5 refers to “Christ’s obedience” rather than “obedience to Christ.”

This essay includes five sections. First, I argue that while scholars are nearly unanimous in their acceptance of “obedience to Christ” as the proper interpretation of τὴν ὑπακοήν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, very few arguments have been made on its behalf. Second, I discuss previous arguments in support of my reading. Third, I examine the role of Christ’s “narrative” in 2 Corinthians and how that narrative

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Author’s note: I would like to thank Love Sechrest and David Downs of Fuller Seminary, Douglas Moo of Wheaton College, and Thomas Stegman of Boston College for their input into earlier drafts of this essay.

1. Richard N. Longenecker, “The Obedience of Christ in the Early Church,” in Reconciliation and Hope: NT Essays on Atonement and Eschatology (ed. Robert Banks; Exeter: Paternoster, 1974) 142. Longenecker includes 2 Cor 10:5 in a list of texts referring to obedience to Christ, in keeping with the usual reading of this text (ibid., 142 n. 3). Longenecker’s choice of texts has found little opposition in subsequent years, with the possible exception of 1 Pet 1:2 (εἰς ὑπακοήν καὶ ῥαντισμὸν αἵματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). This reading, however, has not gained widespread acceptance. For the subjective genitive, see F. H. Agnew, “1 Peter 1:2: An Alternative Translation,” CBQ 45 (1983) 68–73; and, more recently, John H. Elliot, 1 Peter (AB 37B; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 319. For the more common objective genitive, see, e.g., J. Ramsey Michaels, 1 Peter (WBC 49; Waco, TX: Word, 1988) 11; Karen H. Jobes, 1 Peter (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) 75–76; Paul J. Achtemeier, 1 Peter (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 87.

2. In grammatical terms, I will argue that τοῦ Χριστοῦ should be read as a subjective rather than an objective genitive. I prefer to say “Christ’s obedience” and “obedience to Christ,” however, because this is ultimately a debate about referent (to what does the phrase τὴν ὑπακοήν τοῦ Χριστοῦ refer?) and not about grammar (what type of genitive is being used?).
relates to 2 Corinthians 10:5. Fourth, I discuss Paul’s rhetoric in 2 Corinthians, particularly how he portrays his ministry in contrast to that of his opponents, again arguing how that rhetoric suggests reading τὴν ὑπακοήν τοῦ Χριστοῦ as “Christ’s obedience.” Finally, I argue that the immediate context of τὴν ὑπακοήν τοῦ Χριστοῦ encourages the translation “Christ’s obedience” rather than “obedience to Christ.”

**DISCUSSION OF τὴν ὑπακοήν τοῦ Χριστοῦ IN SECONDARY LITERATURE**

Most scholars simply assume that τὴν ὑπακοήν τοῦ Χριστοῦ should be translated “obedience to Christ”; only a few offer specific arguments on behalf of that reading. These arguments come from two sources: similar vocabulary in the immediate context, and similar phrases in the larger Pauline corpus. Regarding the first, Barrett and Furnish argue that the repeated use of ὑπακοή and παρακοήν in the following verse (10:6) confirms that the subjects of the obedience are the Corinthian readers, and so Christ must be the object of that

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3. The primary exception to this survey is Thomas Stegman (*The Character of Jesus: The Linchpin to Paul’s Argument in 2 Corinthians* [AnBib 158; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institutute, 2005] esp. 121–37), who argues that τὴν ὑπακοήν τοῦ Χριστοῦ should be read as “Christ-like obedience.” Stegman also notes David F. Ford and Frances M. Young, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (BFT; London: SPCK, 1987) 239, 271; and Sam K. Williams, “Again Pistis Christou,” *CBQ* 49 (1987) 341–47. Williams states that τὴν ὑπακοήν τοῦ Χριστοῦ is ambiguous (that is, we should not assume that “obedience to Christ” is the only option), but that is the extent of his discussion (ibid., 345 n. 16).

Donald D. Walker (*Paul’s Offer of Leniency* [2 Cor 10:1]: Populist Ideology and Rhetoric in a Pauline Letter Fragment [WUNT 2/152; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002] 323–24) also takes the subjective genitive reading due to the fact that “Paul’s use of the noun ὑπακοή throughout his letters suggests that when he modifies it with a genitive referring to a person, he describes the subject of the implied action.” Walker’s reasoning is in large part identical to Stegman’s fourth argument.

obedience. While no specific argument is given, it may be that Harris has a similar notion in mind when he states that τοῦ Χριστοῦ “is unquestionably an objective genitive; any reference to the obedience shown by Christ . . . would be out of place in the context.”

Unfortunately, none of these scholars give any arguments as to why obedience in vv. 5 and 6 must have the same subject. The only commonality between the two phrases is the word ὑπακοή; one may note that both instances of ὑπακοή are connected to a genitive noun, but because the genitive noun in one instance is Χριστοῦ and in the other is ὑμῶν, this hardly strengthens the argument that both have the same subject. Scholars frequently suggest different subjects for ὑπακοή and παρακοήν in v. 6; why must ὑπακοή in vv. 5 and 6 have the same subject? Perhaps one may read the passage with this assumption and make sense of it, but no substantial reasons for this assumption have been presented.

Some scholars point to similar Pauline phrases as a second basis for translating τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ as “obedience to Christ.” Bultmann states that “obedience to Christ” parallels “obedience to [the] faith,” “Glaubengehorsam,” in Rom 1:5. Windisch points to Rom 10:16 (“obedience to the gospel”) and 1 Pet 1:22 (“obedience to the truth”). Furnish makes note of 2 Cor 2:14 (“knowledge of God”). However, as before, no reason is given as to why these particular passages must be the lens through which we interpret τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ. None of these scholars discusses the broader contexts of these “parallel” passages, to see whether similar issues are being addressed.

**STEGMAN’S ARGUMENTS FOR “CHRIST’S OBEDIENCE”**

Thomas Stegman offers four reasons why “Christ’s obedience” is a superior reading of τὴν ὑπακοήν τοῦ Χριστοῦ: (1) the parallel phrase τῆς πραΰτητος καὶ ἐπιεικείας τοῦ Χριστοῦ in v. 1 is a subjective genitive; (2) the phrase τῆς...
ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἑνός in Rom 5:19 suggests the centrality of Christ’s obedience in Paul’s thinking; (3) throughout 2 Corinthians, Paul emphasizes the Corinthian church’s *ethos* in relation to Christ’s *ethos*; and (4) grammatically, Paul’s use of ὑπακοῆ elsewhere suggests that τοῦ Χριστοῦ be read as a subjective genitive. Because I take up a variation of Stegman’s third argument below, here I address the first, second, and fourth arguments.

*Christ’s “Meekness and Gentleness” as Programmatic for 2 Corinthians 10–13*

Assuming that τῆς πραΰτητος καὶ ἐπιεικείας τοῦ Χριστοῦ is subjective (or even possessive—“the meekness and gentleness that Christ possesses”), why should it be considered programmatic or even influential for the meaning of τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ? The mere existence of one reference to the “character of Jesus” does not guarantee the existence of another. Stegman and others have noted, however, that the placement of τῆς πραΰτητος καὶ ἐπιεικείας τοῦ Χριστοῦ in the opening line of Paul’s appeal in 2 Cor 10–13 suggests that Christ’s character “takes on great prominence, serving as the background against which to read and interpret all of 2 Corinthians 10–13.” This mitigates Harris’s earlier argument that reading τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ as “Christ’s obedience” is out of place in the immediate context, particularly because Harris himself argues that “the first part of 10:1 stands as a rubric forchs. 10–13.”

Paul, on several occasions in 2 Cor 10–13, validates the “weakness” of his ministry by appeal to Christ. In 11:23–30, for example, he argues that his status as a “servant of Christ” is best established by pointing to his persecutions, sufferings, and hardships. In 12:8–10, he suggests that his weakness supplies the very opportunity for Christ’s power to rest on him. Finally, in 13:1–4, he points out that his own weakness in dealing with the Corinthians parallels that of Christ, who “was crucified out of weakness, but lives out of the power of God” (13:4).

Philip E. Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962] 345; and (2) the incarnation (Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 460; Barrett, *2 Corinthians*, 246; Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 302). Both options assume that τῆς πραΰτητος καὶ ἐπιεικείας τοῦ Χριστοῦ is a subjective genitive; that is, it refers specifically to Christ’s actions at one point or another.

12. This argument reflects the thesis of Stegman’s whole book: the character (ethos) of Christ is at the heart of 2 Corinthians. Here he asks whether if one accepts that premise, “is it not plausible that τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ might refer to the *ethos* of Jesus?” (Stegman, *Character of Jesus*, 131). See pp. 47–51 below for my agreement with Stegman on this issue.

13. Ibid., 131–32.


Paul responds to his critics in 2 Cor 10–13 by arguing that if he is weak, it only confirms that his ministry is modeled after that of Christ. The appeal to the “meekness and gentleness of Christ” makes this clear from the outset and thus serves as a “rubric,” to repeat Harris’s phrase, for the rest of the letter. Therefore, Stegman has successfully established a literary context in which “Christ’s obedience” is, conceptually, a plausible reading of τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

“The Obedience of Christ” and the πίστις Χριστοῦ Debate

Stegman’s second argument is, in my opinion, less helpful. Stegman suggests that because Jesus’ faith(-fulness) and obedience are important to Paul in other contexts, such as Rom 3:21–26, those concepts must be in Paul’s mind in this text as well. To say that Jesus’ obedience is important to Paul is, however, not to say anything at all about this particular text. The broader implication of Stegman’s argument is actually that the current discussion regarding a Christological narrative in Paul, encapsulated in the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate, has relevance for reading τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Stegman places too much weight on this connection. First, no necessary connection exists between an emphasis on narrative Christology in Paul and a subjective rendering of πίστις Χριστοῦ. Second, τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ occurs only once in the NT, while πίστις Χριστοῦ occurs several times. The latter involves numerous contexts, while a discussion of the former can be confined to a single book and a single text. Thus, the process for engaging these two phrases will vary due to the differences in the volume of material involved.

16. Stegman (Character of Jesus, 97) argues that the chronological proximity of Romans and 2 Corinthians indicates that “the apostle wrote both letters within the same framework of recent experiences and of particular pastoral and theological reflections,” and that “the close proximity in time between the writing of these letters goes a long way toward explaining some of the structural and conceptual similarities in the two letters.” He does little, however, to substantiate this inference, and in fact earlier says he is not optimistic about “purely historical approaches” to reading 2 Corinthians (ibid., 78).

17. For the most recent foray into the πίστις Χριστοῦ discussion, see the essays in Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle, eds., The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010).

18. James Dunn points out that Christ’s obedience (Rom 5:19), his Jewishness (Rom 15:8; Gal 4:4–5), and his living out God’s love commands (Rom 15:1–3; Gal 6:2) establish a Christological narrative in Paul with or without reference to πίστις Χριστοῦ (foreword in ibid., xvi).

19. The following texts are central to the debate: Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:16, 20; Phil 3:9 (Kenneth Schenck, “2 Corinthians and the πίστις Χριστοῦ Debate,” CBQ 70 [2008] 524).

20. I do not mean that Paul’s language or theology in 1 Corinthians, for example, has no bearing on his language and theology in 2 Corinthians. But if one wishes to make a claim about what Paul meant by πίστις Χριστοῦ in one text, one must take into account the other places Paul uses that precise phrase or its variants, even if one does not read the phrase the same way at each point; to make a claim about τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, on the other hand, involves only one primary text.
Second, the contextual ties between 2 Cor 10:5 and the πίστις Χριστοῦ texts are limited to a possible reference to the story of Jesus Christ and a grammatical choice between subjective and objective genitives. Unless someone is prepared to argue that the epistles (Pauline or otherwise) cannot refer to the story of Christ, there is no reason why the same arguments must prevail in both cases. Furthermore, at this point in the πίστις Χριστοῦ debate, most scholars have recognized that grammar alone does not sway the discussion firmly in one direction or another. Thus, the only clear point of continuity between the πίστις Χριστοῦ texts and 2 Cor 10:5 is not one on which we can lean heavily.

Paul’s Grammar of Obedience

Stegman’s final argument is that, while it is possible to speak of obedience to someone using the “genitive of person,” Paul never does so. Rather, Stegman points out, Paul uses either ὑπακούω + dative, such as in Rom 10:16 (ὕπηκουσαν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ—“obedience to the gospel”) or a passive form of ὑποτάσσω + da-
tive, such as in 1 Cor 14:32 (προφήταις ὑποτάσσεται—“subject to prophets”). Stegman examines those texts in which Paul uses ὑπακοή + the “genitive of person” and concludes that, in every single case, the genitive is “uncontestably subjective.” In all, Stegman considers 36 texts: 11 using ὑπακούω + dative object, 18 using the passive of ὑποτάσσω + dative, one use of ὑπακούον + accusative object, and 6 cases of ὑπακοή + genitive of person.

One may contest Stegman’s argument on at least three grounds. First, Stegman’s emphasis on the genitive of person (a category not found in any standard Greek grammar) leaves out a pair of texts that may signify the object of obedience with the genitive: Rom 1:5/16:26 (“the obedience of faith”). Given that scholars have often associated these texts with 2 Cor 10:5, one would at least expect Stegman to discuss it.

Second, highlighting Rom 5:19 (which Stegman does on several occasions in this section) as the most important textual parallel to 2 Cor 10:5 could be accused of circular reasoning—it is only an important parallel if 2 Cor 10:5 refers to Christ’s obedience.

Third, Stegman admits that many other authors “signify obedience to someone with the genitive of person,” in fact, ὑπακούον + genitive object, precisely the construction Stegman argues against, is the norm in non-Pauline literature. Thus, one might say it would be unusual for Paul to use ὑπακούον + genitive object, but Stegman’s language (“the evidence is . . . overwhelmingly in favor of reading τὴν ὑπακοήν τοῦ Χριστοῦ as a subjective genitive”) is too strong.

To conclude this section, Stegman has succeeded in making the case that τὴν ὑπακοήν τοῦ Χριστοῦ can be read as “Christ’s obedience.” Of his four arguments, I find three helpful: the broader context of 2 Corinthians is about the character of Christ, the immediate context (10:1) is about the character of Christ, and Paul’s grammar of obedience permits (but does not guarantee) his reading of the text. I believe, however, that the case can be made stronger still.

CHRIST AND NARRATIVE IN 2 CORINTHIANS

2 Corinthians contains many references to the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. For example, 2 Cor 1:5 (“the sufferings of

24. Ibid., 133. Stegman cites Rom 5:19; 15:8; and 16:19; Phlm 21; and 2 Cor 7:15. See also Walker, Leniency, 233 n. 161, for the same argument using many of the same texts.

25. See Stegman, Character of Jesus, 132–33 for a full list of texts.

26. The grammatical similarity of Rom 5:19 to 2 Cor 10:5 is not sufficient to establish the relationship. If there are any conceptual parallels between the two contexts, they are not immediately apparent, and Stegman does not develop them. He notes that Rom 5:19 establishes that “the obedience of Jesus is God’s way of saving other humans” (ibid., 108), but God’s “saving other humans” is nowhere to be found in 2 Cor 10:1–6.

27. Ibid., 132 n. 368.

28. Lim, Sufferings of Christ, 90. This point, as well as the two that follow regarding the use of that Christ-narrative to make a Christological contrast between Paul and his opponents,
More important than mere references to the story of Christ is the fact that, at every turn, Paul uses these references to describe his own ministry. Paul opens the letter by referring to God as the "Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (1:3) in the face of suffering, and states that his ability to comfort those who are suffering is based on his sharing in "the sufferings of Christ" (1:5). Those sufferings, Paul says, made him feel as though he "had received the sentence of death" (1:9), and they had forced him to rely on "God who raises the dead" (1:9b). Who had God raised from the dead other than Jesus? Apart from the death and resurrection of Jesus, God does not encourage Paul, and Paul cannot encourage the Corinthian believers.

In 4:7–15, Paul suggests that he has suffered in his ministry in order to demonstrate that the "transcendent" power belongs to God and not to him (4:7). By suffering he is "always carrying the dying of Jesus in the body" (4:10) so that the life of Jesus may be manifested (4:11). How is Paul confident enough to go through this suffering and death? He is confident that "he who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus" (4:14). Once again, the death and resurrection of Jesus is the foundation upon which Paul's ministry is built.  

are hardly controversial. But they anticipate my more substantial claim, which is that 2 Cor 10:5, and particularly τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, are key participants in that contrast.

29. Harris (2 Corinthians, 145–46) objects to reading τὰ παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ as "Christ's sufferings" on the grounds that Paul regarded the atoning death of Christ as a completed event; thus, they cannot "abound" to us. The text does not say, however, that these sufferings must be something that is yet incomplete; it merely says that they overflow to Paul. See Martin, 2 Corinthians, 9; and Barrett, 2 Corinthians, 61 in support of reading this phrase as referring to Christ's own suffering.

30. Harris, Second Corinthians, 345–46; Barrett, 2 Corinthians, 139–40; Thrall, 2 Corinthians 8–13, 332–34; Hughes, Second Corinthians, 141–42; Martin, 2 Corinthians, 87.

31. Hughes, Second Corinthians, 192; Martin, 2 Corinthians, 129; Harris, Second Corinthians, 418–19; Barrett, 2 Corinthians, 169; Thrall, 2 Corinthians 8–13, 400.

32. For a discussion of this text, see ibid., 532–34; and Harris, Second Corinthians, 578. Scholars are divided as to whether Christ's becoming poor refers to the incarnation itself, or to a particular aspect of Christ's life while incarnate. Thrall's observation that for Christ to have transitioned from wealth to poverty, little other than the incarnation itself makes sense (in what sense was Christ wealthy just prior to the crucifixion?) is strongest, in my opinion.

33. For reading τὴν νέκρωσιν as "dying" rather than "death," see Lim, Sufferings of Christ, 109–11.

34. See Martin's (2 Corinthians, 87) comment on this text: "Paul's intimate association of his apostleship with Jesus' death is a major theme of his ministerial life." Similarly, Thrall
In 5:11–21, Paul describes his ministry in order to help his readers respond to those criticizing Paul without submitting his ministry to the Corinthians themselves. “We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you reason for boasting about us, in order that you may have [an answer for] those who boast in appearances and not in the heart” (5:12). Why must Paul not set himself up as accountable to his readers? “For the love of Christ controls us” (5:14a). Why and how does ἡ ἁγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ control Paul? “For this we judge,” Paul says next, “that one died on behalf of all, therefore all died; and he died on behalf of all in order that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for the one who on their behalf died and was raised” (5:14b–15).

Paul’s ministry is under the authority of the Christ who died and was raised, and so it would be tantamount to rebellion against Christ for him to present himself in submission to the Corinthian church in the way that they have requested.

Rhetoric and Christology in 2 Corinthians and τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ

Thus far, I have attempted to show that in 2 Corinthians, Paul frequently refers to the “Christ event” in order to defend and/or describe his ministry. In what follows, I will argue that Paul does so to make a Christological contrast: that the paradigm for Paul’s ministry is the suffering of Christ, and the paradigm of ministry for his opponents is something else. In order to do so, I will ask three key questions: (1) Why is Christology such a key part of Paul’s defense of his ministry? (2) What aspects of Paul’s Christology are meaningful for this particular discussion? (3) What does Paul’s Christological presentation tell us about the Christology of his opponents?

Why is Christology so important for Paul’s defense of his ministry? First, Paul’s ministry is from God through Christ. “God is the one who establishes states that the motivation and character of Paul’s ministry have their "basis in the Christ event" (2 Corinthians, 400).

35. Whether this phrase should be read “Christ’s love for us” or “our love for Christ” is an ongoing debate, though “Christ’s love for us” has the advantage at this point (Hughes, Second Corinthians, 192; Martin, 2 Corinthians, 129; Harris, Second Corinthians, 418–19; Thrall, 2 Corinthians 8–13, 400).

36. It may seem awkward to leave the description of their ministry as “something else.” However, regarding this particular issue I do not find it necessary to make strict judgments as to the details of their teachings and practices (or on their identity as Jewish Gnostics, Judaizers, etc.; for that discussion, see, e.g., Harris, Second Corinthians, 67–89; and more thoroughly Jerry L. Sumney, Identifying Paul’s Opponents [JSNTSup 40; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990]; and Dieter Georgi, Die Gegner des Paulus in 2. Korintherbrief [WMANT 11; Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag, 1964]). What matters here is that from Paul’s perspective, his opponents were doing ministry that did not conform to the sufferings of Christ; for Paul, this is “something else” besides true Christian ministry.

37. These questions each deserve their own essays, but I will restrict my comments to issues that are relevant to the specific questions at hand.
us with you in Christ and judges us” (1:22); “All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (5:18); “On behalf of Christ, therefore, we are ambassadors just as God appeals through us” (5:20a). From Paul’s perspective, if his view of ministry is incorrect, his view of Christ must also be faulty.

This relationship between Paul’s “theology of ministry” and his Christology is not lost on the Corinthian church. Thus, second, Paul gives a Christological defense of his ministry because part of the criticism of that ministry has been the request for “proof that Christ is speaking in [Paul]” (13:3). 38 The Corinthians understand that the minister in whom Christ speaks is the one to whom they should pay attention. We expect, then, that Paul would explain and defend his ministry in Christological terms, that is, in terms demonstrating how Paul’s ministry is rooted in Christ.

Third, Paul resorts to Christology to respond to the criticisms of his opponents because there exists between his own ministry and the ministries of his opponents a critical difference in Christology. 39 Paul makes this plain in his accusation against the Corinthian believers: “For if someone comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you received another spirit whom we have not received, or another gospel which you had not accepted, you put up with it readily” (2 Cor 11:4). Both Paul and his opponents have claimed to speak for Christ, and part of the purpose of 2 Corinthians is to settle the validity of those claims.

What specific aspects of Paul’s Christology are meaningful for this particular discussion? I find the title of Timothy Savage’s work most helpful: Power through Weakness. 40 At every turn, Paul’s presentation of Christ in 2 Corinthians involves paradox. 41 In 1:3–11, suffering leads to comfort. In 4:7–12 and

38. Furnish, II Corinthians, 576.

39. Furnish states regarding 11:4: “It is not even clear that this verse warrants the identification of ‘Christology’ as the basic difference between Paul and his opponents in Corinth, because nowhere else in 2 Corinthians is Christology taken up as a topic in and for itself,” and goes on to argue that the real issue at hand is “the nature of Paul’s apostolic service” (ibid., 501). My point is precisely that the “nature of Paul’s apostolic service” hinges on Paul’s Christology, and so Paul does not envision the first without the second. As Frances Back suggests, Paul’s opponents intend by their criticism of Paul’s ministry to “versuchen, durch die Predigt eines ‘anderen Evangeliums’ und durch ‘Verfälschung des Gotteswortes’ (2 Kor 11,4) zu erreichen, daß die Christen in Korinth vom ‘Gehorsam gegenüber Christus’ und damit von Gott abfallen” (Verwandlung durch Offenbarung bei Paulus: Eine Religionsgeschichtlich-exegetische Untersuchung zu 2 Kor 2,14–4,6 [WUNT 2/153; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002] 86).

40. It is no mistake that, while Savage’s title refers to Paul’s theology of ministry in 2 Corinthians, he goes on to say that the contrast between Paul and his readers is “the radical disjunction between the secular prejudices of the Corinthians and his own conception of Christ which spawns his paradoxical description of the Christian ministry” (Power through Weakness, 99).

41. Savage is certainly not alone in recognizing the paradoxes in 2 Corinthians; one need only glance at the titles of monographs on the letter: Sze-kar Wan, Power in Weakness (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000); Voigt, Die Kraft des Schwachen; Heckel, Kraft
5:11–15, death leads to life. In 8:9, poverty leads to riches. In 12:9–10, weakness leads to power. Every Christological and ministerial paradox in 2 Corinthians begins in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ’s suffering allows us to comfort one another (1:3–11). Christ’s death leads to our life (4:7–12). Christ’s poverty has given us riches (8:9). Paul presents this paradox of Christ’s experience in life, death, and resurrection in order to make this point: our experience should be the same.42 Paul’s opponents call him weak, and rather than disagreeing with them Paul says that “it is precisely in such weakness . . . that true power, the power of God, becomes effective in his ministry.”43 How is this a Christological principle? “The inspiration for this conviction comes from the cross of Christ itself, where the principle of power working in what the world regards as a place of abject weakness receives its most striking manifestation.”44

What does Paul’s Christological presentation tell us about the Christology of his opponents? I have argued that in 2 Corinthians we should not make too much of a distinction between Paul’s concept of ministry and his Christology. We do not have clear statements of what Paul’s opponents said about Christ, and yet, in Paul’s view, they make their Christology clear by what they said about Paul. By criticizing Paul for being weak, physically unimpressive, and a poor public speaker, they are making Christological statements because they name these things as reasons to doubt Paul’s credibility as a minister of Christ. We can avoid, then, the danger of “mirror reading,” that is, assuming every positive assertion Paul makes about Christ implies that his opponents were saying the exact opposite. We do not need their explicit statements about Christ; it does not matter whether Paul’s opponents ever said “Christ did not suffer in his earthly life,” or anything of the sort. The fact is that they have implied this very thing by their accusations against Paul.

According to Paul, his opponents’ Christology is missing a key ingredient: the weakness/suffering/poverty/death of Jesus. This is why Paul frequently describes and defends his ministry by referring to the “Christ event.”45 Paul understands that their misconception of ministry is more fundamentally a misconception of Christ.

in Schwachheit; Norbert Baumert, Täglich Sterben und Auferstehen: Der Literalsinn von 2 Kor 4,12–5,10 (SANT 34; Munich: Kösel, 1973).
42. Lambrecht, 2 Corinthians, 596.
43. Savage, Power through Weakness, 185. This is why I think Furnish is mistaken in arguing that 2 Corinthians is primarily about Paul’s ministry rather than his Christology. Paul cannot speak of one without the other.
44. Ibid., 185.
45. This may also be why Paul becomes frustrated at the necessity of boasting to validate his ministry (11:21b–12:10). He can make the same claims as the ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλων: he is a Hebrew, an Israelite, and a descendant of Abraham (11:22). He has had revelations and visions (12:1–7). He has performed the signs and wonders that demonstrate apostleship (12:12). But these do not validate his ministry.
One may easily accept all that has been said thus far about Paul’s emphasis on the story of Christ as the basis for his ministry in contrast to the ministries of his opponents. But is this the governing principle for reading the specific text under consideration?

**Paul and His Opponents in 10:1–6**

The first key question is this: does 10:1–6 entail a contrast merely between what Paul’s opponents accuse him of doing and what he actually does (e.g., whether he is “humble” when with them and “bold” when away [v. 1], or whether Paul ministers κατὰ σάρκα [vv. 2–3]), or additionally a contrast between what Paul’s opponents themselves do in their ministries and what Paul does in his ministry? Scholars are unanimous that at least the first is the case, and a couple of phrases suggest that the latter is true as well. First, the “meekness and gentleness” in v. 1 contrasts with Paul’s descriptions of his opponents, who are caught up in boastful comparisons (10:12, 11:5, 11:12, 11:21).

Second, the accusation that “his letters are weighty and strong, but his presence is weak and his speech despicable” (2 Cor 10:10) suggests that Paul’s opponents viewed him to be adequate (that is, strong) in writing, but inadequate (that is, weak) in person. Thus, again Paul’s appeal to Christ’s “meekness and gentleness” may indicate that Paul is specifically contrasting their emphasis on strength with his emphasis on weakness.

Third, following from the previous point, the “boldness” that Paul is accused of portraying in print is apparently characteristic of his opponents. He is accused of being strong in print but weak in person (10:1, 10), to which he responds that he is the same in print or in person (10:11). He then notes that this boldness is not like that of his opponents: “not that we . . . compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves” (10:12). The point is that the boldness Paul does not want to demonstrate in person is the very boldness that his opponents demonstrate (and that Paul to some degree does demonstrate, though not willingly, in 11:1–12:10). Thus, when Paul’s description of his ministry in 10:4–6 contrasts with the type of “bold” ministry described in v. 2, he is likely contrasting his ministry with that of his opponents.

Finally, consider the participles in vv. 4–6: καθαιροῦντες, αἰχμαλωτίζοντες, and (ἔτοιμῳ) ἔχοντες. Each modifies in part the fact that the weapons of Paul’s warfare are “powerful toward God for the destruction of strongholds,” as opposed to being “fleshly.” Thus, Paul’s weapons serve three purposes: to destroy arguments and obstacles raised against the knowledge of God, to take thoughts
captive to the obedience of Christ, and to have [readiness] to punish disobedience at the proper time. 48

Regarding the first detail, that Paul’s weapons are for destroying πᾶν ὑψωμα ἐπαιρόμενον κατὰ τῆς γνώσεως τοῦ θεοῦ, Harris notes that ὑψωμα suggests, in warfare contexts, not a neutral concept such as “height” but rather something defiantly raised against authority. 49 Paul is evidently highlighting, given the stark contrast between what is ὑψωμα ἐπαιρόμενον and the meekness of Christ, a difference between his ministry and that of his opponents.

The third participle, Paul’s stated intent to “punish every disobedience” (v. 6), suggests that Paul is not merely answering the accusation at hand, but further indicating how he will deal with those accusing him. This is not to say that his opponents refuse to participate in “punishing disobedience” but rather simply that Paul has the misleading nature of his opponents’ teaching in mind.

This leaves us with the middle characteristic of Paul’s weapons: that they are for taking captive every thought to the obedience of Christ. Might we assume, given that the other two participial phrases describing Paul’s weapons in 10:5–6 both point to specific differences between Paul’s ministry and that of his opponents, that this phrase highlights some aspect of that difference as well?

I suggest, then, that in 2 Cor 10:1–6 Paul intends to contrast his own ministry, which is characterized by both the meekness of Christ and the ability to wage war, with the ministry of his opponents, which is characterized by boldness and boastful comparison. If this holds, one must ask how taking thoughts captive “into obedience to Christ” fits into the contrast between Paul and his opponents.

We have no reason to think that “obedience to Christ” was explicitly not part of Paul’s opponents’ preaching. On the contrary, we have reason to believe that allegiance to Christ was critical to their teaching and to their identity. Paul’s opponents present themselves as being “of Christ” (10:7), “apostles of Christ” (11:13), and “servants of Christ” (11:23). At no point does Paul say “my opponents are encouraging you not to obey Christ.” 50 Therefore, I find it difficult to see any clear contrast between Paul and his opponents in τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ if we read it as “obedience to Christ.” 51

48. Harris, Second Corinthians, 684.
49. Ibid., 682.
50. Paul certainly does not believe that his opponents are encouraging true obedience to Christ. But because the opponents are presenting themselves as encouraging true obedience, Paul would have to qualify his statement “obedience to Christ” in some way so as to make the contrast clear (how is the true obedience Paul encourages different from the false or misguided obedience encouraged by his opponents?). Reading τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ as “obedience to Christ” does not offer that necessary qualification.
51. Reading τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ as submission to Paul’s teaching (Martin, 2 Corinthians, 306; Wolff, An die Korinther, 199) is equally unhelpful. For Paul to say that his weapons of warfare (i.e., ministry) are δυνατὰ τῷ θεῷ for the purpose of taking thoughts captive into submission to his own teaching would be very strange indeed, for it would set up the
On the other hand, if we read it as “Christ’s obedience,” we have a perfectly logical contrast: Paul’s opponents do not believe that the goal of their ministries is to take thoughts captive to Christ’s obedience, that is, to Christ’s submission to suffering and death.\(^{52}\) Paul in this text is suggesting not that his opponents openly lead people not away from Christ but away from Christ’s obedience.

Siege Warfare and τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ

The second argument of this section concerns the role of τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ within the warfare metaphors in vv. 4–6. In light of the abundance of military terminology in this passage, many have suggested that Paul has borrowed the progression from the imagery of siege warfare: first the outer defenses are destroyed, then the defenders are taken captive, and finally, the victorious army stands ready to punish any continuing rebellion.\(^{53}\)

The first reason translating τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ as “Christ’s obedience” works best within this progression is that it lessens the (often observed\(^{54}\)) difficulty of Paul portraying Christ as a violent conqueror, subjugating the metaphorical city like any other general would, immediately after invoking Christ’s “meekness and gentleness” (v. 1). If we read τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ as “obedience to Christ,” we have no way of resolving this tension. But reading it as “Christ’s obedience” suggests that Paul is not only aware of this tension, it is precisely his point: Christ conquers, yes—but his humility/obedience, rather than his boasting and self-exaltation, is the means by which he does so. The paradoxical nature of this victory is, again, entirely in keeping with Paul’s Christology throughout the letter. If weakness is strength, if suffering can console, and if death leads to life, why should not obedience take captives?\(^{55}\)

\(^{52}\) As Wolff states, Paul’s opponents have “lehnen letztlich eine Gotteserkenntnis ab, die sich durch den gekreuzigten Christus erschließt” (Wolff, An die Korinther, 198; emphasis mine).


\(^{55}\) One may argue that this particular paradox is not analogous to the others—the first three pairs are clear opposites (weakness/strength, anguish/consolation, death/life), while taking captives/obedience is not. The immediate context of siege warfare, however, may suggest otherwise. In a war, there are two sides: those who are victorious and those who are defeated. To say it another way: there are some who take captives, and some who are taken
The second reason relates to a commonly observed tension within v. 6. That tension lies within the fact that Paul refers to punishing every disobedience at the exact time that your (his reader’s) obedience has become complete. Many suggest that when the Corinthian church retakes its place under Paul’s authority (your obedience), Paul will then proceed to punish either those “super-apostles” who have misled them, or those Corinthians who persist in creating division in the church (every disobedience).

Why does this obedience/disobedience tension in v. 6 suggest that “Christ’s obedience” is a better translation than “obedience to Christ”? I return to the earlier discussion where I argue that, because both Paul and his opponents claim to speak for Christ, Paul does not simply invoke “Christ” (as though his opponents were preaching allegiance to “Baal”). Rather, throughout 2 Corinthians he says something specific about Christ (that he suffered, etc.). That principle holds here: if Paul is attempting in v. 6 to divide those whom he trusts will believe him (the Corinthian church) from those whom he knows will not (either some from that church or his opponents, or both), his rhetoric fails if the division is based solely on invoking “Christ.” But if the division is based on the obedient Christ, that is, the suffering and crucified Christ, his readers can perceive what distinguishes one camp from another and can choose accordingly.

CONCLUSION

And so we come to the crux of the matter: what exactly does “taking every thought captive to Christ’s obedience” mean? Stegman suggests reading it as “and we take captive every thought unto ‘Christ-obedience,’” by which he means that the goal of Paul’s ministry is to bring every thought into conformity with “a habitual mode of human existence lived in obedience to God” (emphasis original), that is, into “Christ-like obedience.”

Stegman’s interpretation is helpful in that it changes the goal of Paul’s ministry from something vague (obedience to Christ) to something specific (obedience that follows the example of Christ). At the same time, I think Stegman’s reading is insufficient. The irony and paradox of weakness becoming strong, death leading to life, and having riches in poverty are lost if we simply read this text as Paul desiring to take thoughts captive into obedience that is like Christ’s. In order to retain both the polemic (the Christ whom Paul preaches was obedient rather than self-serving) and the paradox (the obedient Christ

captive. The relationship between victory and defeat is, I think, precisely the relationship between life and death, strength and weakness, and consolation and suffering. Thus, the paradox is that obedience (the state of being defeated) has taken captives (a victorious act).

56. Furnish, II Corinthians, 464; Martin, 2 Corinthians, 307.
57. Barnett, Second Corinthians, 467; Harris, Second Corinthians, 687. Harris suggests that both options may actually be correct.
58. Stegman, Character of Jesus, 135; emphasis original.
takes captives) of the phrase, I suggest that we understand it as “our weapons are for . . . taking every thought captive to *the obedient Christ*.”

It is not merely for obedience that thoughts are taken captive, nor is that obedience merely owed to Christ, nor even is that obedience merely modeled after Christ. All these are true, and yet they miss the crucial point of τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ: that Paul’s ministry intends to lead thoughts captive not to the feet of a conquering king who exalts himself as Paul’s opponents are apparently so fond of doing, but to the feet of the weak, impoverished, dying, obedient Christ.